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T. CALVIN McCLELLAND

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A MEDITATION UPON WHAT JESUS SAID ON CALVARY. ⚜ ⚜ BY T. CALVIN McCLELLAND, MINISTER OF UNITED CHURCH, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

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TO MY FATHER
WHOSE FATHERHOOD MADE REAL FOR ME
THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

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HE chapters of this little book were sermons made for United Church in its fourth annual series of meetings for Deepening the Spiritual Life. Some of those who heard them said they were helpful. And it was said that the sermons would help more people if they were printed. Every minister wants to help more than he can in the limited field of his ministry. So the sermons are printed, substantially as they were preached, in the hope that they may be of larger usefulness in deepening spiritual life. I am grateful for a little book called "The Seven Words from the Cross," by Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll, the reading of which constrained me to prepare this series of sermons; for "Prayers Ancient and Modern," by Mary W. Tileston, in which I found some of the prayers I have used; to the sermons of Phillips Brooks, whose thoughts I keep thinking after him, and especially for the sermon on "Humility," which gave a suggestion for the "rule to live by," which is in the last chapter; and to Dr. Henry van Dyke, who read the manuscript.

T. C. McC.

The Manse, Newport.

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Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

HE pearl drops through the rude fingers of him who cleaves the shell; the perfume clings to the rough hand which crushes the rose; the starlight slips through the storm-clouds to spill itself in broken beams over the raging sea.

He had been the great discoverer in the spiritual life. It was not that He had discovered God; men had found God long ago; no one knows when it was, or who made that discovery. Belief in God's omnipotence and omniscience is as old as the race, and prophets as far back as Moses have talked of His holiness.

But this was Jesus' great discovery,—that Fatherhood is the motive of all that God does. God is all-powerful, all-wise, all-holy, all-truthful, but these attributes are just perfect tools with which the Fatherhood goes to work. "God so loved that He gave," that was Jesus' discovery; Fatherhood the mind and heart, the attributes the hands and feet.

That was the idea in which, by which, for which the Christ lived; so of course it was the idea which was uppermost when the end came. God was His Father, and their Father, and what could He do to make them understand that but forgive them. "Ah, Gabriella," said David, "it is love that makes a man believe in a God of Love!"

"Father, forgive them," and they were work-

ing the crime of crimes. Ingratitude was holding its carnival; jealousy was enjoying its banquet. He was a young man, yet He had lived long enough to get into the habit of living and to love it; and now they were wrenching life from Him, but this seemed to be His only bitterness, — that they who hurt Him might be hurt. He spent His last strength in making one splendid attempt to gain their priceless souls. They had bound His hands that He might not touch their blinded eyes; they had tied His feet that He could not run with healing to their sin-sick souls; but only death could close His lips, and until that came, He used them in prayer for those who most needed the things which prayer works.

In every household there are heirlooms; things which were given mother, or mother's mother, on her wedding day. Of these keepsakes, some are guarded for the sake just of auld lang syne. But there are others which we can put to service still with the added joy of knowing that she used them. And faith has heirlooms too: great words, hymns, and prayers. Some of these are of the first class, saved for their very oldness. But Jesus' prayers are of the other kind, — they are like old cups which can be used every day, and as we use them we feel the fragrance of His breath on the rim. This prayer He made and used, and was it not left to us to use too?

"Father, forgive them"; a real Christian is called on most often to pray that prayer, just as a real Christian most often prays, "forgive us our debts." How easily we pray the latter, how hard

to say the former. Shame on our poor forgivings! fie on our begrudged pardonings! What profit is there in keeping grudges, in caressing our wounds? Nothing in the world adds so much to the sum of pain as not forgiving and forgetting.

Jesus once told a story about a home whose gladness over the return of a fore-wandered son was spoiled by the unforgiving attitude of a brother, who when he was told the cause of the gladness "was angry, and would not go in." And so he not only spoiled the day for the family, but he kept himself out in the cold, loveless and unloved. And He had another story of a king's factor who was pardoned a great debt by his king, but who showed no mercy to a poor man who could not settle a small bill of a few pence that he owed him. And it was said that when the king heard this of his factor he "delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due." Jesus finished that story by saying, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." And that means it is better not to live than not to forgive. "Father, forgive them," -- we would use that prayer oftener, if we would only remember that nine times out of ten they who hurt us "know not what they do." We think that they know, but they do not. James and John think it will be a fine service of their Master to call down fire upon a village of churls, but He says, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." It is the trick of sin to make a man work in the dark. He thinks he

strikes at a human heart; really he is wounding the heart of God.

They knew not what they did. The traitor who made his best Friend a bargain, the churchmen whose perjured brief won a verdict in their favor, the Roman judge whose cowardice put the finish on the ghastly parody of law, the soldiers who were just the tool in the hands of those who wrought this crowning sin,—they knew not what they did. But Jesus knew. He saw their action in its awful wholeness; He knew that they were compassing no less a thing than the murder of the Son of God. And even this was not too large for Him to hope it would be lost in the deeps of the Father's forgiveness. How vast it must be,—that forgiving love of God! Treason base as Judas', hate hot as Caiaphas', cowardice despicable as Pilate's, cruelty awful as the executioner's, can get washed away and the soul that wrought it come forth clean as the soul of a babe.

They knew not what they did; nor do we. We know not what we do when we break faith, turn craven, follow recklessly on passion, spread crimson over the soul of one once white.

Sometimes it is given to a man to see with greater clearness the face of a long-done sin. Five, ten, twenty years ago, a mind was stained, an imagination was poisoned, a life was degraded. It seemed so small a thing that day, that night, so small; but it has grown now, and the thought of it fills memory to the brim. The sin involved more lives than one. The first life damaged has passed out of sight, out of ken,

we cannot find him; eager to ask his forgiveness, we cannot make our voice carry the long distance to him. Now we know something of what we did, but not all. But He knows, Jesus knows its utmost bound, its deepest depth; and He who knows it through and through and all in all, tells of freedom from it.

Were all the sins of all the men who have lived, who live, or will live compassed in that forgiving love of God, there would still be room lest any poor prodigal should be left out in the cold.

I knew not what I did, but He does, and this is the first word from Calvary, — "Father, forgive him; he knows not what he does."

". . . His love looks mighty,
But is mightier than it seems;
'T is our Father: and His fondness
Goes far out beyond our dreams.
There 's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There 's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.
But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own.

"There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;

There is joy for all the members
In the sorrows of the Head.
If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord."

A PRAYER OF THOMAS À KEMPIS

I offer up unto Thee my prayers and intercessions, for those especially who have in any matter hurt, grieved, or found fault with me, or who have done me any damage or displeasure. For all those also, whom at any time I may have vexed, troubled, burdened, and scandalized, by words or deeds, knowingly or in ignorance; that Thou wouldst grant us all equally pardon for our sins, and for our offences against each other. Take away from our hearts, O Lord, all suspiciousness, indignation, wrath, and contention, and whatsoever may hurt charity, and lessen brotherly love. Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on those that crave Thy mercy, give grace unto them that stand in need thereof, and make us such as that we may be worthy to enjoy Thy Grace, and go forward to life eternal. Amen.

Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

HREE crosses stand out sharp against the Syrian sky. I am glad that there are three instead of one; glad, that since the other two crosses had to be set up to satisfy the common law, they were planted in a row with His on the top of Calvary.

I am glad for Jesus' sake. By that coincidence the prophecy was fulfilled,—"He shall see of the travail of his soul." "One of the malefactors who were hanged railed on him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." In the contrition and homage of that one culprit Jesus learned that He was making no vain sacrifice. Before three short hours of His lifting-up had been accomplished, He saw that word begin to be realized, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." He who was crucified for love and he who was crucified for crime, hand in hand, swept through the gates, through which love had once come to be crucified for crime.

And for our sakes I am glad that there are three crosses instead of one. First, because the

sight quickens our respect for human nature. A soul is worth dying for down to the last. No life is so lost that it cannot be found. Jesus must have seemed so little like a king as He hung there that noontide. Every regal feature was hidden with contumely or disguised with shame. Save to the little group of women and to John, the title Pilate put over His head was just a clever joke. But the robber saw that the judge had written better than he knew: beneath the ignominy he found the royalty of Jesus; in the ruin, majesty; in the defeat, victory. And through all the wild babel of derision, like the plaintive song of a lost woodland thrush in the heart of a city's tumult, this cry smote on the ear of the Saviour, — "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom."

It was far into the night; where had been a fine fire on the hearth, there was now only a heap of gray ashes; still I lingered at the fireplace. Suddenly from the pile where I was sure everything had gone out, leaped a little tongue of flame which sent out shining spears through the thickening chill. Any day you may expect to see from the white ashes of a sinful life, a spark of fire leap upward for the sun. If that damaged fragment of humanity who hung on the cross next to Jesus had enough soul left to find and claim his king, who was half-hidden in the débris of Calvary, then in all the world there is no life so far gone but has enough of man left to be worth any price asked for his redemption.

It is true that the world comes slowly up to the cross. But in our impatience we must remember that there are more than we ever see who creep in out of the darkness to kneel and wash His feet with their tears. We would not have marked that crucified criminal for a disciple; but he was just one of an innumerable company who through their sin, as he, or through their doubt have lost peace and are sick for the touch of that Infinite Hand which can shut a man in with peace, and shut out from a man his sin. How desperately men whom we vote callous, cynical, or infidel feel their need of the Eternal, with what hot eyes they scan the still sky above them, no one knows but He whose "mild and magnificent eye" sees more and better in the night than we can see in the light.

Old Jake did chores about camp. He had no trade, no money, no family, no home but that which he got from season to season in return for cutting, piling, and carrying the logs for the camp-fires. But work was not his strong point; he preferred "swappin'," and such things. He was one of the folks we are apt to call "goodless mortals." No one loved him, no one but the coon cats; wherever you met Jake, you met a coon cat. One night, — it was well on toward twelve o'clock, — I was making preparation for an early start to John's Pond; the gun had to be cleaned and I was out of oil. Jake had a kind concocted after a secret known only to woodsmen. His chores had been finished hours before; there was no reason why

he should not be in his bunk; so, as I came to his cabin, I stepped quietly, and cautiously lifted the latch, for there was no use waking him. I knew I was welcome to his oil if I could find the bottle in which he kept it.

But Jake had not turned in. Far over in the corner he sat, with his head bowed over something which he was slowly tracing out with his finger by the light of an old stable lantern. I called him but he gave no answer; he was hard of hearing—when he wanted to be. So I slipped over to his side and laid my hand on his shoulder, and there was his hand lying on a cheap, well-worn copy of the New Testament, and his finger just under the line,—"I will arise and go to my Father."

"Jake,"—I had to say it slowly, for something kept rising in my throat,—"Jake, what are you doing?" "I'm readin' the good Book," he answered, with that nasal drawl of his; "it tells me about Gawd, and I read a piece in it every night of my life."

I forget what I said; I forgot the oil.

But as I went out and stood under that deep mountain sky, I wondered how many more men of whom I never dreamed it, were "readin' a piece in it every night" of their lives.

And I thought that the world was full of men reaching up after the Father, as the dark spaces overhead were all full of unseen stars which were reaching out their far-away light to find and fellowship our earth.

Sometimes our work does not seem to arrive. The Master had the same experience. Not even

Jesus succeeded everywhere. The nails in one cross broke into the native fountains of one heart and its long-pent-up flood poured out at last. The nails in the other cross made its victim like the trapped brute which snarls at everything which approaches his snare. The Sun of life drew out of the soil of one life the blooms of sympathy, repentance, and faith. Under the same heat the hard soul of the other compacted to granite. It was not the first time; at Nazareth it was said, — "He could there do no mighty work" because of their unbelief. Every honest worker comes up against the same experience sooner or later. Nothing hurts more than to have good words and works fall like rain on a sandy shore. It is easy then to write bitter words against oneself because one has failed. But some time divine power "seemed no painful inch to gain." The King of Love lost and won the same day.

And the three crosses show how dear to divine Love is just one life. The Crucified had come to His most absorbing hour. Yet was He not so engrossed but He could listen to the plea of one friendless man. It was only one life, and that such a poor life, in the countless throng He was dying to save. But it was one, and that one needed Him, and the many had to wait while the Saviour soothed the pang of the one.

"Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit
with Spirit can meet —
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than
hands and feet."

Verba Crucis

There is no one nearer to thy God than thyself. Jesus did not tell us much about heaven. He left us no chart of its lines, no description of it as a locality. But at least twice He defined its character; once when He bade His friends farewell, He said that He was going to His Father's home, where are "many mansions"; and again, as He stood with one foot upon the frontier of the "eternal open," He paused to make a tryst with a prodigal, for that day, in Paradise. Heaven! Is it one of the stars which burn in the blue, or is it scattered through many stars like those in the Milky Way? Or must the departing spirit wing its way beyond the tiniest speck which glints in the Pleiades? In the hushed chamber waiting for that last moment, which seems so slow in coming, but which when it comes is always unexpected, we have shuddered to think how remote is God's side of the universe; it is a long and solitary journey from the death-bed to the home of the soul!

"To-day with Me in Paradise"—the mists rise, the questionings get hushed, the unseen presses upon us from every side; this is heaven, —to be "to-day with" Christ.

It was my first morning in London. The day had broken bleak and heavy. I stood in Trafalgar Square. There swept over me a sense of utter loneliness. There were the maze of unfamiliar streets, the tangle of strange sights and sounds. I was no part of this great city's life, I was a mere fragment tossed for a moment on its edge. Suddenly my eye caught the flash of

a little gold jewel on the breast of one of two men who were approaching. I did not know them, I had never seen them. But I knew the jewel, I had one pinned upon my own breast. It was the badge of the old college society. We saluted and greeted, and in a moment the sun shone out, and there came a feeling of hominess, and the great city's tangle was forgotten in the pleasant sense of fellowship. Persons make places; characters create landscapes.

So it comes to pass that when we know what it means to be with Jesus, we know what it is to have heaven. It is to live a life, to be one in mind, in feeling, in will with the Saviour. To love the good, to want to live with the good, and to repeat Him who went about doing good, is to have the Spirit of Jesus, and to have the Spirit of Jesus is to be at home with God.

And can that be? The morning sun found on Calvary one man whose life was foul; before it came to noon that life had lost its foulness as a nightmare vanishes from a wakened man. The same hammers which drove the nails struck on the portals of Paradise and the Saviour and the saint swept through the gates of glory where are no sins, no burnings of conscience, no memory of earth's failures.

God always speaks "to-day" to a life which is tired of sin. However He may make us wait for some things, He never keeps us waiting for pardon and peace. "To-day with me" He speaks every morning to every soul; we may not hear the words, but still are they spoken over us; still goes He with us to every Calvary; still

Herba Crucis waits He near us for life to find and claim its satisfaction.

It is not far away to heaven. One may be in heaven, and yet be attending to his business, playing with his children. It is so near that you may enter it now; it is just the meeting of a soul filled with penitence and a Saviour filled with power. Just to call Him your Master, just to be willing to live with Him anywhere, and it is done. You are with Him, fast in God's keeping, locked in the peace of the Eternal.

A PRAYER

Saviour, King of Love, remember us, do not in Thy kingdom forget us though we often forget Thy kingship. Master us; we are weary of our own mastery and of the world's. Let us hear Thee saying to us every day, To-day with Me, and help us to live every day with Thee. Saviour, Thou didst never let any one who came to Thee from afar go away empty. We have come to Thee from afar, from the far land of our doubt, our dread, our sickness and our sin. Fill us full of Thyself, keep us full of Thyself, bring us down to life's finish so wrapped up in Thee that we shall not be afraid to close the shutters on the windows of life when the night comes and go out into the silence with Thee our King, forever. Amen.

He saith unto his mother, Woman, behold, thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother!

HERE stood by the cross of Jesus his mother." We could have been sure of it, even if John had not told us. It is a way mothers have, they are always near our crosses. It is sad but beautiful that mother love seems to be at its best in the atmosphere of pain. Like the night-blooming jasmine it sheds its ravishing fragrance in the dark hours. And Mary was no less a mother because she had so great a Son.

"Near the cross was Mary weeping,
There her mournful station keeping,
Gazing on her dying Son.
There, in speechless anguish groaning,
Yearning, trembling, sighing, moaning,
Thro' her soul the sword had gone."

In her pride of young motherhood, she had brought her Babe to the Temple. That day the aged Simeon had forewarned her,—"A sword shall pierce through thine own soul." Often she had wondered what that meant; now she knew. It had been buried to the hilt in her heart. And her Son knew it. And although He knew that some day Mary would hang that sword in her central shrine in the Father's house and tell the ransomed how that trophy had won for her a glorious day, He knew something else,—the hunger of a famished mother heart. He felt how the saddest hour in a mother's life is that in

which she is released from the duty of meeting and filling the needs of her boy. Herein has a mother her greatest joy, — in forethought of his wants, in feeling the dependence of his comfort on her care. Mary had too soon reached her limit. Hers was —

"That utter grief which sees no farther pass,
But from the verge looks on vacuity."

He knew that and felt it. Could He give her some other's emptiness to mother, the keen edge would be taken off her desolation. "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold, thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother!" This strikes one first, the Saviour's appreciation of natural affection. Even on the cross He had thought for His widowed mother. The one sorrow of the dying saint is the thought of the long rough road that must be plodded by the dear ones left behind, until they may come to the one who has gone before. I know one who walks with God; a day came when it seemed as if the soul must slip off the body, so weak and damaged by pain had it become. As he lay thinking if he would go, he raised his eyes to the faithful wife and said, "Ah, the outlook 's so bright, so bright — only how will it fare with you and the lad?"

And as we look at the Crucified, it is the same question that we see in His eyes. For He waits a little before going, to make a smooth place for her weary feet clear down to the day she

would pass to the home He was going to make ready for her.

You cannot stand on Calvary without feeling that it is not unmanly to be loving and leal, to utter the heart's humanest emotions, to keep clean and warm the place for love of home and friendship. It is so easy for men as they get engrossed in some art or phase of the world's work to grow cold and forgetful of the amenities of kinship and friendhood. It is not uncommon to find great workers lose susceptibility and delicacy of feeling. There are Darwins living to solve great problems but dying to romance and poetry.

Paul might have had the third word from the cross in mind when he wrote to Corinth: "Desire earnestly the greater gifts. And a still more excellent way shew I unto you. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." It was a wonderful word to drop into the midst of those men who were so anxious to become Christian teachers, physicians, and reformers; that is a noble wish, Paul seems to say, but let not that ambition crowd out your capacity for loving; beware of the atrophy of feeling; do not let your life-work cramp the room for natural affection; should a man lose love and the passion to be loved, though he be great in all else, he is in the final test less than all, even nothing.

While the first fierce shock of pain was racking every nerve, He lost sense of His own suffering in the thought of the peril of His enemies

and prayed, "Father, forgive them." His ears were hearing the multitudinous cries of a sinful world, but He took time to open the gates of Paradise for a dying thief. But now He stoops still lower,—to draw the edges of a gaping wound together, and stanch the flow of grief from mere natural affection. The prayer for His murderers was in unison with that world-embracing petition which He was offering in the sacrifice. The word to the thief was one of the threads in the wonderful skein He was weaving into coronation robes for redeemed humanity; but this thought was of the mother's earthly happiness. One might say that this was beneath the attention of so august a moment. But not He; He knew God's way; the Father makes the sun the pivot of a multitude of worlds, but makes it put a richer green into every blade of grass and deck with finer tint every drop of dew. As the Father had worked hitherto, had He not to work? And near His cross stood one poor widow, for whom His dying meant bereavement, loneliness, and homelessness, and He said, "Woman, behold, thy son," and to the disciple, "Behold, thy mother."

One has said, "There is no danger in giving to religion an exaggerated greatness, but there is danger in giving it an isolated greatness, holding it apart, pushing it into the firmament, and making an inaccessible sun of it, instead of making it the familiar sunshine, enswathing every little thing with light."

Jesus had showed Mary how she must expect this. He had intimated over and over again,

that His dying was to open the door to the undying; that His sorrow was to be the cradle of a joy which could not wither. But her eyes were holden, and her mother vision was bounded by the cross; while beyond that — what? All the great things He had suggested, all the wonderful things He had done, were lost in the abyss of that bereavement. And now did the Son reproach? Was there one shade of impatience with her dulness, one note of rebuke? Did He even speak of the future, talk of heaven, give promises of reunion? "Woman, behold, thy son," — only one little sentence, one drop of ointment, but its perfume filled her little world.

And will we be so uncharitable with surmounted things? "Men ought to know better," we say; and the voice gets stern and the words sting. "Ought to know better?" Perhaps so. But why? Because we do. And were we never where they are now? Did we always see, were we never deaf? See the advantages we have had, the light, the visions, the voices. And men are ignorant, short-sighted, earthly; but beneath all beat hearts, hearts that are sad, still so tender that they may be melted and inspired by love. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."

So much the world suffers from the rebuke and criticism of untempted men, — men who know not the world's frame, who remember not that it is dust. Speak hopefully to men, from the height of thy great experience turn thy face toward the sun, then get thee down to the wanderers with the light of the kindness of God

Verba Crucis upon thy countenance, that men may know how there is —

"... no place where earth's sorrows
Are so felt as up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given."

"He saith unto his mother, Behold, thy son! To the disciple, Behold, thy mother." One day this mother came seeking Him while He was preaching. Those standing near said, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to thee"; and He made this answer, pointing toward His disciples, "Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." In His presence love owns and yet transcends the mere kinships of blood. That mother's love for Jesus gave her heart to call Christ's friend her son; that same friend's love for his Master made Jesus' mother even as his own, and "from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home." The human kinships are not ignored, rather indeed does this same incident on Calvary show how religion deepens them, but they get a wideness of meaning which overflows the confines and obligations of the home. Margaret Ogilvy was only eight years of age when the home was left without a mother; and Barrie tells us how the power of loving touched the child and made her the little mother of the household, and neither baby brother nor father lacked aught of solicitude or care.

And so ever since Jesus hung upon the cross, the world has heard the Saviour's word ringing in its ear, and lives that were one time strangers have knit together with a kinship closer than that which birth gives. Amidst all the hate and strife, the inhumanity of man to man, we see prophecies of a crowning day, when we shall all know each other as brethren and God as Father.

Here on Calvary the scales drop from the eyes, the narrow walls of the home fall away, the circle of the heart's affection expands, we see an holy city, the walls of jasper, the pavement of gold, the portals open day and night toward the old world of sin, and the atmosphere is filled with ravishing music,—and the cause of this joy? One after another the men come up the shining avenue toward the Father's house, and as He catches sight of each, He calls: "Rejoice with me, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Let us keep faith with the Crucified. He will give us the brother's heart toward brother man, and the son's heart toward the Father, God.

A PRAYER OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Give, I pray Thee, to all children grace reverently to love their parents, and lovingly to obey them. Teach us all that filial duty never ends or lessens, and bless all parents in their children, and all children in their parents. O Thou in whom the fatherless find mercy, make all orphans, I beseech Thee, loving and dutiful unto Thee, their true Father. Be Thy will their law, Thy house their home, Thy love their inheritance. And I earnestly pray Thee, comfort those who have lost their children, giving mothers grace to be comforted though they are not; and grant us all faith to yield our dearest treasures unto Thee with joy and thanksgiving, that where with Thee our treasure is there our hearts may be also. Thus may we look for and hasten unto the day of union with Thee, and of reunion. Amen.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

E stand at the Holy of Holies of Jesus' sorrow. Here the heart must be high-priest,—the heart purged from curiosity and clothed with reverence; the heart alone may raise the veil and enter the mysterious shadow of this central solitude in His passion.

It was about three hours after noon. A thick darkness had been brooding over all, and out of the wild tumult of the morning hours there had come an awesome hush. Then arose the cry,—the bitterest that ever smote on human ears,—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It is too deep to express anything so commonplace as mere fear of death. Not that a shrinking from the article of dying would have been an unseemly or unnatural emotion for Him. He had got used to living, and life was sweet. But in this cry was something else than the recoil of a beautiful and sensitive spirit from the cold touch of dissolution. He had lived to die. All His life He had been busy getting ready for this hour. He had spoken of dying with serenity. His words upon the lips of any other would seem like rapture. His death was to be the hour when "the Son of man should be glorified"; by His death He was to be "lifted up from the earth" and He would "draw all men unto" Him. Surely from what He had so eagerly anticipated He was not now flinching—flinch-

ing with such unutterable alarm as is expressed in the fourth word from the cross.

And surely no man can get at this heart of the Saviour's sorrow, can see Him cling, despite all the sense of dereliction, to God as "my God," and think that the cry was pressed out of Him by any vision of a blazing judgment-seat. To have to think of Jesus as actually suffering punishment for any sins, would be to make conscience disloyal to its King.

Think of things which happened before this awful cry rent the circumambient shadows. Jesus knew He was to die. For months before He had been ascending the altar to the sacrifice. And yet Jesus did not know all. The details of His dying, the incidents of its mode,—these things it seems He did not realize. In foresight, the means which would accomplish His dying were lost sight of in His rapt thought about that dying as a self-sacrifice. But on the night of the Pascha He came in sight not only of His end, but of the hideous accompaniment of that end.

In the Upper Room His pure soul seemed to grasp for the first time the real nature of the death He was to go to. This revolting truth looked Him eye to eye,—the thing He most hated, the sin He had come to destroy, was to be almost a partner with Him in His crowning act. A disciple who had been in His sacredest confidence was to initiate the crime by treachery; another was to give it momentum by cowardice. Sin was to mix itself up with His work of grace; and the touch of the thought was like

the sting of living fire in the marrow of the soul. Then came the cold kiss of the traitor, the hatred from the flashing eyes of those who stood for all that religion meant, the scorn from the sneering lips of those who were the guardians of peace and the administrators of justice, and the awful consummation when those He was dying to save had their sins dyed a deeper crimson by His crucifixion. Verba Crucis

In Gethsemane Jesus had felt the cold edge of the poison cup pressed against His fevered lips. Throughout the long weary hours of Thursday night and Friday morning He had to drink long draughts of the bitter brew. But the dregs were saved for the afternoon. For six interminable hours He hung upon the tree, patient, tender, forgiving, loving,—for six interminable hours in the sight of those who should have been quick to see the Kingship through the shame, the Messiahship through the suffering. But the "light that was in them was darkness," and there was not one word of remorse, not one breath of repentance, not one sigh for pardon from them. Rather His very patience, forgiveness, and love went to augment their wickedness.

Was it all a failure? Could men look face to face with such love and remain unmoved? Could He leave no impression upon their adamantine hearts? Was the sufficient force for redemption to become the efficient agent in their condemnation? Would He have been human if He had not felt as if the world of faith were suffering earthquake? Would He

still be bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh if such a thought of desolation had not for a moment blinded Him to the vision of the Father? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was blinded by the density and ingratitude of man, stunned by the utter sinfulness of sin, baffled by the conditions of the sacrifice; it seems as if He was caught in the maelstrom of utter failure, that the thought flashed over Him,—the last most fatal suggestion of the Tempter,—"I must be all alone; surely the Father has forgotten me."

But it was only for a moment; the voice, brimful of dismay, had a touch of something else in it, "My God, my God." Here as in the wilderness where the Tempter took his first try at Him three years before, Jesus gave him no lien upon His life. The swimmer makes one superhuman stroke, one last desperate grapple with the engulfing wave; it flings him upon the rocks, the jagged rocks that cut and bruise the quivering flesh; there is one cry—of pain? A cry of pain, yes, but something else, it is a cry of joy; he realizes that his pain is but the proof of his rescue from the overwhelming deep. "My God, my God," the cry of doubt was the cry of faith; that determined hold on God as "my God," that clave the gloom, and out beyond the present He saw the perspective of the ages and in the midst of them stood the stained Cross drawing men home to God.

Sometimes one wishes that John had forgotten to tell us of this word of Jesus'. It seems so inexplicable, so unfathomable; but when the soul

lifts the veil and stands at this central shrine in the temple of His life and listens while the broken heart tells the meaning of what it hears and sees, the soul gets eager that it may grasp the hand of the evangelist and tell him that this is the jewel of greatest price in all the cluster of words which he has brought us from Calvary. For since that word of doubt slipped the lips of the Crucified, none can ever doubt that Jesus touched the bottom of man's woe and sorrow.

"Upon the white sea sand
There sat a pilgrim band,
Telling the losses that their lives had known;
While evening waned away
From breezy cliff and bay,
And the strong tide went out with weary moan.

"One spake, with quivering lip,
Of a fair freighted ship,
With all his household to the deep gone down;
But one had wilder woe—
For a fair face, long ago
Lost in the darker depths of a great town.

"There were who mourned their youth
With a most loving ruth,
For its brave hopes and memories ever green;
And one upon the west
Turned an eye that could not rest,
For far-off hills whereon its joy had been.

"Some talked of vanished gold,
Some of proud honors told,
Some spake of friends that were their trust
no more;

And one, of a green grave
Beside a foreign wave,
That made him sit so lonely on the shore.

"But when their tales were done,
There spake among them one,
A stranger, seeming from all sorrow free;
'Sad losses have ye met,
But mine is heavier yet:
For a believing heart hath gone from me.'

"'Alas!' these pilgrims said,
'For the living and the dead—
For fortune's cruelty, for love's sure cross,
For the wrecks of land and sea!
But, however it came to thee,
Thine, stranger, is life's last and heaviest loss.'"

That is life's last and heaviest loss, to lose the sense of the unseen, to bury faith, to have one's grip shaken from the grasp of ideals, of the kingship of duty, of the good Fatherhood, of the reality of a future life; to feel that these things are only fancies, vague dreams of a sweet untroubled slumber, a will-o'-the-wisp from the grave of dead traditions and outworn beliefs.

"No death can further desolate
The soul that knows its God was dust."

Faith loses its outlook in so many ways. Sometimes it is the black night of a great disappointment which closes in on one and leaves no horizon beyond the ring of present bitterness. Sometimes the light of the home-life is blown out and the dependent life is left to walk the

weary way in the shadow of a loneliness so sombre that even the Light of the World does not tinge it with a ray of hope. Sometimes it is a great sense of sin which smites the soul with blindness, the consciousness of a desperate wickedness in one's own life; or the thought of the pervasive power of sin in the heart of the race will sometimes shut down on one and leave one groping in the dark as if the eyes were put out. How often to the eager enthusiastic worker for God comes this discovery of sin on every side of him, in the midst of his own heart so set on high-toned living, mixed up with the home-life, the friendship, the society, the business, the church upon which he has set his confidence. What fine serious young life does not come to know this, — in spite of himself the feeling rushes in, — the feeling which doubts that God is really on the field.

There is no sorrow like that, the sorrow of a soul who has had visions of God and then lost them. What has Christ to say to that? How often one bereaved of his faith has thought, He has no word for this. Christ never knew doubt. He knew the pang of physical pain, the smart of bereavement, the sting of treachery, the torture of the touch of sin upon a sinless soul; all He knew save this, — the doubt of God, the sense of Godlessness, — this He never knew. How often an overdone belief in His divinity has kept the heart in ignorance of the true inwardness of this cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"!

That is the word of brotherhood with doubt,

fellowship with the feeling when night is not only outward but inward; the cry out of the forest, where even the stars are blotted out, and there is no voice, no hearing in the pathless waste. Then became He perfect in suffering, then struck He the lowest note in human anguish, then took He the crown as Man of Sorrows.

And the word the Saviour has to speak to this experience is a little one; it is the word "my." "My God, my God"—cling to that pronoun. It is the skeleton key which will open any complicated lock on the gates of Doubting Castle. Believe it, it is not sinful to doubt, to get swept away with a sense of desolation. That does not prove that the connection with God has been broken. Your soul sinking under its burden has staggered up to the door of heaven, and the hot sweat of spirit has blinded the eyes so that you miss the place of the gate. You hear no voice, you see no light. Speak not bitter words about yourself; say not that you have lost faith because you have missed feeling. This is your faith, that you hold to God as "my God" in spite of feeling; that you mock the night with the cry of need; that you call into the silence, "My God, my God." What a reach has that call of determined need; though it be only a sigh it will penetrate the thickest wall of desolation, and He comes, God comes, not the angels of Gethsemane this time, but the Father Himself; and as the Everlasting arms enfold, thou whisperest, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

When we are most alone let us be most alone with God. When we are nearest abandonment, let us most abandon ourselves to Him. Fix our heart amidst the peril with the word "My God," and through the deafening roar shall come whisperings of peace and the sound of the footfalls of God coming swiftly over the highway of Love.

"If ever you get lost in the woods," said our guide, Nate Thrasher, "just stop still, climb a tree and look to the hills; you know Spotted Mountain is on the north and Saddleback off to the south of the camp." And we all saw the sense of that. The trails change with the seasons; every high wind gives a twist to them, throwing over them some new blow-downs; the sun takes a path through the sky differing a little each day to the north or the south according to the time of year; or maybe there is no sun, the clouds having crowded up over his track. But the hills can be trusted, they are steady; the most the seasons can do with them is to change their color from silver to green, and from green to purple, crimson, and gold; the wind cannot break up their sky-line; the clouds may swirl around their flanks, but when they pass over, there are the hills, Spotted Mountain always to the north and Saddleback off to the south of the lake, on whose shores is the log-camp with its blazing white birch on the fireplace sending up pleasant curling proofs of warmth, welcome, and rest.

And life is just like the woods; it is easy to lose oneself in the thick of it, but there are always

the hills "from whence cometh our help," — the Father who waits for us to claim Him and use Him. We do this when we make Him our own, when we pass from the exclamation "O God" to "my God."

He said, "Forsaken." Then doubt is not sin.
But 't is to stand in the night, and, within
Feel, for a while, as if day could not win.

His cure was this; to hold fast through the night,
Though bowed and blind with the dust of the fight,
God; God as "my God," unseen, but my right.

Jesus, my Brother in doubt, man's one Way,
Spite of night without, within, help me say
Thy one word, "My"; "my God"; now breaks the day.

A PRAYER OF GEORGE DAWSON

O Lord our God, keep us from all darkness except such as our own foolishness brings over us. Let us remember that there is no darkness with Thee. Let us have but one thing to be afraid of — the death of the spirit. Let there be but one thing that we shrink from — unlovingness towards Thee and our brother. And when the storm is loud, and the night is dark, and the soul is sad, and the heart oppressed; then, as weary travellers, may we look to Thee; and beholding the light of Thy love, may it bear us on, until we learn to sing Thy song in the night. And when the last chill stream of death shall be crossed, grant that ours may be the Delectable Mountains, the company of faithful souls, the eternal years, the everlasting life. Of Thy great mercy hear our supplications, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I thirst.

E have seen how Jesus lost His way in the forest. For one dread instant He missed the Father, but it was only for an instant, and they were hand in hand again. Doubt's path is strange but it is not untried. Jesus walked in it and found His way home again. He had satisfied His soul. Everything was all right, the work was safe, the Father was close beside Him, "all things were now accomplished." There was nothing to be done for others which He had left undone.

For the first time in His life He had a moment to think of Himself. "I thirst," He said, and "there was set there a vessel full of vinegar: so they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon hyssop, and brought it to his mouth," and He drank of it. It was just like Him; He had always shared the soldier's fare. He asked just as if He had forgotten that they had denied Him everything, just as if He believed that they would give Him anything. "'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister,' still in His love He suffered men and women to minister unto Him, and at the last received gently and humbly this solace from a foe."

Do we know what we lose in concealing all our need and pain, in never drawing up another chair before the fireplace that is in the heart's chamber of sorrow? There is a twofold loss to the man who never permits another to minister

to him in his grief, — a loss of power to the life that shuts itself in, a loss of opportunity to the life that is shut out; a loss of power to the life that shuts itself in, because the appeal for sympathy is the longest lever for the lifting of the world nearer God; a loss of opportunity to the life that is shut out, because selfishness in sorrow takes away the chance of self-forgetfulness which is the essence of sainthood.

There are solitudes of sorrow which must always be solitudes, 'dim valleys of silence which may never have the fall of a footstep within them save God's and one's own'; dark Gethsemanes on the edge of which as one passes into them he must leave even Peter, James, and the beloved. In such places the soul and God have to be alone.

But there are hungers and thirsts, sorrows and needs, which the world can meet, which the world is willing to meet, which it will do the world good to meet. It is pathetic how often those who are in need grieve that they are laid a burden on their friends; how they excuse themselves for the favors which they ask of human kindness. But in the light of the cross, with the dying Saviour bending His head that the soldiers may moisten His lips with a taste of their wine, is it not a favor which need gives rather than takes when it asks to be filled?

See how that one little cry for drink transfigured for a moment the dark lives that were gathered around the Crucified! For a moment sin was suspended and virtue flashed out into

beauty; hate and passion were held in subjection to mercy and compassion; the flint-like crust of utter wickedness was broken up and the fountains of tender emotions unsealed. That one small word about a need which they could understand so well, reached and wakened the sleeping pity in their souls, and from crucifiers they were changed into ministers of kindness. Verba Crucis

The strongest thing in the world is weakness. On the outside it looks as if things were run by sheer force. That was the sad, sad story modern science at first brought to us; only the strongest survive, the kingships of life are red in tooth and claw. But now science sees deeper, and she speaks less of a law of struggle and more of a law of self-sacrifice. The world is seen to be all full of struggle for the weak, deepening solicitude for those who are not able to take care of themselves. More life is given for others than is taken from others.

It is the sufferer who is the potent force for salvation. Have you never felt the refining touch of the sufferer's life? That day you went to sit by a sick-bed, to keep silent company with a friend who felt that he had lost the light of his life, to nurse a little child through an hour of pain, to lend a hand to some overworked woman, to read asleep a worn-out laborer in the vineyard of life, — when you gently shut the door behind you and came away, you felt wholesomer, better, stronger. For a while, at least, it was impossible for you to make selfish plans, harder to think bad thoughts, easier to take up duty with a brave heart, happier to bear some

burden which up to the time of making that visit you had been trying to shirk.

We know homes which have been sweetened by the coming of a little babe; rooms whose atmosphere is like heaven's because an invalid who needs some one's help has long lain there. And we remember a day when we were just about to step into some hot centre of pride, passion, or greed, when we were called to turn back and lend a hand to one who had come to a hard place, and in doing this the passion cooled and the greed got forgotten.

As you sat in the solitude of the darkened chamber have you stopped to think what you and that dark chamber are doing with and for your friends and neighbors? As every mail brings some tender message of condolence or offer of helpfulness; as you lift the long-stemmed blooms out of the box which has just come to you from one who in the sweet gift of flowers thus expresses his sympathy; as you take the hand of an acquaintance whose warm grasp clasps your trembling fingers and listen to his request to be used by you in your hour of weakness, — has it occurred to you that this sorrow of yours has for the moment at least transfigured you and set you into the great company of the saviours whose ministry of suffering has purged the heart of the race and brought the divine image in mankind out into the light? Your suffering has caused you to set going in human hearts the tenderest motives of life; it has broken up the hard crusts of selfishness and let the springs of love leap out in words

and deeds of kindness; it has loosened the grip of the material on the lives of your fellows and let them feel the pressure of spiritual realities; it has allured one man, a dozen men, perhaps a hundred men, from the thought of their own desires; it has quickened their sense of brotherhood; and to have the sense of brotherhood is to be on the way to knowing the Fatherhood of God.

And so it is that the life which keeps its sorrow all to itself, which never speaks of its need, is letting the rust spoil the edge of the best tool for helping God in the making of character.

The thing which drags life down is self-seeking; the thing which lifts life up is self-sacrifice. It is the self-centred life which is sinful; that which throws a man off the self-centre has redemptive efficiency. When a selfish life thinks of another life, it has broken loose from sin and begun to be religious. Every appeal of sorrow, every moan of pain, every weakness which claims another's strength, is lifting the helper into heavenly places. Every thought of mercy, every deed of pity, is an upward movement, a reach of the soul for its own, a quickening of the life of the spirit.

Give the world a Man of Sorrows and the Kingdom of God is come; give a neighbor the chance of offering a cup of cold water to a thirsty child and salvation is nigh unto that household.

Christ save us from pride in our pain; Christ show us how to be willing to be dependent upon each other's helpfulness.

It was the second time they had given Him to

drink as He hung upon the cross. The first time He declined; this time He accepted the solace. He would not, as Robertson tells us, "suffer one drop of the cup of agony which His Father had put into His hand to trickle down the side untasted, neither would He make to Himself one more drop of suffering than His Father had given."

It makes us think of those days in the wilderness when He first looked into the eyes of His mission. For forty days He was caught up above consciousness of physical need in the wrapt meditation on His life-work, and "He afterward hungered." Then came the temptation to eat the miracle bread; but He clasped hands with the best instinct of His race, as it cried, "Man shall not live by bread alone." Though hungry, He let Himself hunger yet more, lest the soul should starve in feeding the body. But when the soul had been nourished, when it had eaten and drunk its fill, then He became the Guest of the angels, receiving their cheer and refreshment.

And now at the last He does the same thing: says "nay" to the first drink they bring Him; receives the sour wine they offer at the end. And why not? The suffering had reached its limit at this time. The lowest note in the gamut of human agony had been struck in the cry of doubt. There had been done for others all that could be done, pain had wrought her perfect work, she could go now. So He drank and was revived, and showed us how pain is to be given

room in our lives only so long as love and duty cry, "Endure."

Nothing is so good for the fields as the white winter; but when the sun comes home, then winter must pack her belongings. The lapidary's slicer may go too far; up to a certain line every turn of that wheel brings value to the stone, one hair's-breadth beyond involves loss. Suffering is love's handmaid; when love is as a bride adorned for her husband, pain may be forgotten; pain only comes to the threshold to look on at the mistress' wedding, she is not among those who go in to the marriage.

Jesus did not suffer one moment longer than was needful. He suffered so long as salvation required it; then "when all things were accomplished," He said, "I thirst," and suffering received notice to vacate. The only self-denial which can wear the jewelled order of Calvary is that which actually forgets self, which gives up, goes without, not for the pleasure or profit of going without, but for the sake of some good cause; over such pain the Cross stretches its dear arms in benediction, on the breast of such suffering is hung the red badge of discipleship.

In that little classic called the "Mystery of Pain," one can read these words: "No arbitrary, self-chosen sacrifice is good; there is no source of joy in that; only that sacrifice is good which either we accept for another's sake, ourselves seeing and choosing the result; or that which serves a like end, unseen by us; and surely

serves a better end, being in God's hands and not in ours. For seen or unseen service, sacrifice is good, but only when it is for service."

And it is Phillips Brooks who said: "To me it seems as if the simply ascetic renunciation of any good and healthy thing — that is to say, the renunciation of it purely and directly for the effect which its surrender may have upon the character of the man who renounces it, or for the heightening of the value of the thing itself — had an essential unreality about the act, an implied distrust of the relinquished object, which must defeat its own purpose and make the self-surrender worthless."

In this fifth word from the cross we have the foregleam of the day when "there shall be no more pain." No more pain, for the sin which needs the bath of sorrow, the selfishness which needs the touch of suffering, the life-sickness which needs the refining of pain, — these shall be without the City gates. The cross is the guide-post to the Homeland; the way leads by suffering for suffering till suffering shall end.

A PRAYER

O God, Thou hast made us and knowest best how to use us. Help us to accept Thy way with us as the best way, to say of all things which Thou givest, This is good. When it is well for us to suffer, help us to play the man; when it is well for us to be joyful, help us to be unfeignedly glad like a little child with a new toy. Forgive us that we have too much kept clouded faces, that we have too often thought that Thou didst wish us to be sorrowful, that we have made for ourselves crosses which Thou didst not appoint for us, that we have shunned sympathy, that we have given others too little chance to be helpful to us. Forgive us for these things and give us, O Father, the sweet grace of taking help as well as the grace of being helpful. And when pain has had her perfect work, take us to that life where there is no more pain forever. Amen.

It is finished.

T was the utterance of relief. The spirit had had a long beat against the storm, into the teeth of the tempest; the wings were weary, the breath was almost spent, and there was the nest in the cleft of the cliff only a little farther on.

He had been away from home a long time. It were not unnatural if He were wearying a bit for it. He said, "It is finished." It would not be strange if Jesus was glad it was all over,—the pain, the bafflings, the suffering. We have seen how He did not love pain for its own sake. He did love sacrifice,—the spending and being spent to cleanse the impure, to sweeten the bitter, to smooth the rough.

Sacrifice He loved, but no one knew so well as He that pain is not the eternal and inevitable companion of sacrifice. It was clear to Him how the true association is with joy, how its fellowship with suffering is only temporary, a condition of human life in this world. And here He clasps hands with human instinct,—that instinct which will not let us, try ever so hard though we may, call pain good. Something keeps saying to us, through all the heartbreak,—pain is unnatural, goodness and rapture belong to each other. And at no place in the life of Jesus do we become more sure of it than under the shadow of the cross.

There it is seen how there is good in that which is painful; but it is not the pain itself,

but this,—the sacrifice for God and our fellows; the self-denial which in this world has the doom of bleeding on it, but from which in the perfect life sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

So it seems that Jesus was glad that it was all over. Glad for our sakes, glad for His own, that He had proof that pain was not permanent, that one comes to a morning when he can waken to find the bitter thing vanished like a dream of the night.

He had never refused to endure a pain when love laid it on Him. Poverty, want, even shame and indignity, were embraced with what looked like transport, when the redeeming passion brought them to Him; no draught was too long, too black, if the draining of it would leave one less drop to be quaffed by man's lips; but when He had drained the lees, He flung the cup from Him, crying, "It is finished."

And since that moment we have known that it is not wrong to be glad when pain has wrought her perfect work, to be thinking of the day when love can love to the full, still holding the joy of sacrifice unalloyed with the touch of sorrow. To be poor and wretched, to be halt and maimed, to be bowed and broken, when necessity enforces or self-sacrifice demands, this is "to indeed drink of the cup that He drank of." But to drink of that chalice is to have the right to enter through the gates into the city of which it is written, "God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall

there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Verba Crucis

"It is finished." It was a word which was often on His lips. When the disciples came to Him after He had been talking to the woman at the well of Sychar, He said to them, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." He had often spoken about "being straitened" until He could finish that work. And in the great prayer He prayed on Thursday night, He said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Finishing the work, filling His function full to the brim, that was ever on His mind.

As a steel track, clear, shining, unyielding, persists through the changing territory, sweeping past a forest, glancing over a rolling river, tunnelling a long hill, so this idea laid itself straight through His ministry, bearing His life on in irresistible sweep. It was no word of discontent with or hatred of life; no utterance of impatience for the things which lay beyond, but just the calm glad acceptance of function. He knew what was expected of Him, and He was eager that every thought and action should feel the upward pressure and inspiration of that mission. And now the end was come; from the top of the cross all His days were spread out to His sight, all His work was clear before His eyes; it lay like a new web, without seam, woven from the top throughout, not one thread broken, not one stitch slipped, not an edge frayed; it was finished, perfected; no one could ask any more, no one, not even God.

There is something inexpressibly fine in this self-respect of the Saviour. He always had the unqualified endorsement of His own conscience. He had been able to face the ethical aristocracy of the race and say, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" The verdict of the nation had been that His career was a failure; the sentence of the people was "the cross"; but in spite of all that, He, the One whom they had condemned, He still said of His life-work, "It is finished; it is perfected; there is nothing lacking." They were flinging water at the stars and the stars just shone on calmly, steadily.

What would we give for that spirit! So much of our happiness hangs on what others will say about our work, because so little of our work has the backing of a free conscience. And so little of our work has the backing of a free conscience because so much of what we do gets done with an eye on no higher standard than the opinion of those around us.

When a man can struggle up out of just asking, "Is this profitable, or is this popular?" when a man can forget to care whether what he does will be the best policy, and begins to care whether what he does is right, then his life is "hid with Christ in God." The indifference, ridicule, antagonism, of men cannot affect him. He has taken his orders from the King, and the new commission has lifted him out of the jurisdiction of the petty judges of prudence, policy, and profit, and set him down at the bar of that supreme chamber where Eternal Love is the Master and Judge. Just to be getting

the pattern of our life from God, just to be eager to be following that plan in our days and our nights, just to be set on translating His will into life, and we go straight through the thick of the world's cavillings and apathy, to lay our work before God, whose verdict is "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

"It is finished" so soon! 'Ah, no, it is woefully unfinished, unfairly broken off,' — in some such way, perhaps, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus talked to one another as they wrapped His body in the sheer linen and laid it in the undefiled rock, — 'what a loss to us all that He has gone away so early; He had everything yet before Him; He had hardly begun; what might He have done had He had thirty instead of three years for His ministry; poor unfinished life; we will roll the stone upon His grave, the grave of our hope and faith.' They were standing on the other side of the cross; they saw just, One, in years hardly more than a boy, come to an untimely end. But when the disciple wrote the story of that scene he stood on this side of the cross and saw sin's "perfect cure" flowing from that young Life's wounds and he remembered how the Master cried, "It is finished."

And so no life is either long or short, but every life is either finished or unfinished: finished, if it has done its work even at thirty; unfinished (though it be threescore and ten), if there be ragged ends, broken threads, and skeins still unused on the idle bobbins.

Verba Crucis Every life is long enough for the filling full of its function. From the Master Workman's point of view there are no untimely ends; the completeness of life is not quantitative, it is qualitative; the Great Husbandman sends some of His laborers into the vineyard for a full day's toil, and some are used only for one hour. And so the great question in life is not how long we live, but how well.

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

Some men find their work and finish it before the sun reaches the meridian of mature years, and they lie down to sleep long before evening comes; to other men it is willed that they must labor far into the eventide of life, long after their playfellows of the morning hours have gone to rest. But when we go to rest is not the question half so much as whether, when we go, we have done our day's work. When that is done, then though our end may come, as those who love us might say, "too soon," we may say with a sigh of relief and a smile of noble independence, "It is finished."

Our life is long enough for the largest usefulness, but it is too short for the smallest waste.

A PRAYER OF JAMES MARTINEAU

O God, who hast commanded that no man should be idle, give us grace to employ all our talents and faculties in the service appointed for us; that, whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we may do it with our might. Cheerfully may we go on in the road which Thou hast marked out, not desiring too earnestly that it should be either more smooth or more wide; but, daily seeking our way by Thy light, may we trust ourselves and the issue of our journey to Thee, the fountain of joy, and sing songs of praise as we go along. Then, O Lord, receive us at the gate of life which Thou hast opened for us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

HE had been looking over His work; He could say of it, "It is finished"; He was satisfied; but more, He was satisfied with God.

Twenty years before, when the consciousness of God had burst from bud into blossom, He had said "my Father"; twenty years had come and gone, years shot through and through with such experience that He had won for Himself the name Man of Sorrows, and yet after all He kept the boyhood's faith, — God was still "my Father." Nothing had strained that idea of God. The idea of Fatherhood had broken upon Him in the green pastures of youth when the "still waters" had flowed softly; since then life had led down into "the valley of the shadow of death" where the waters ran blood, but withal at the end, as at the beginning, it was "my Father."

From Nazareth to Calvary He knew God as Father, and not even Gethsemane or the cross could make Him change His mind. Poverty, want, loneliness, heartache, deferred hope, and death only deepened the impression. The storm made the tree strike the roots deeper. What was the secret of that faith? How did He keep His hold so surely in those last hours? He had got used to holding to God as Father long ago. When the first shocks came, the first temptations, He just held on and waited, and always the sun broke clear after the night. And going

on in this way, holding fast through the night to God as "my God," the grasp strengthened and the patience grew from more to more. By the time the blackness of darkness fell Jesus had got into the habit of believing in spite of appearances, and it was possible to keep the faith through all the sorrow of Thursday and Friday.

Everything is gained by holding on through the first strain. Keep the possessive pronoun in the first temptation, and it comes easier in the second. Do not let go in the first struggle and you will not let go in the last.

We have seen a great ship draw into the bay after a long voyage. It is a grand sight. It was a grand sight when she swung off into the tide months ago, with her glistening sides and polished decks, her new canvas and shapely spars. Now the ship is almost disguised. She has passed through winds variable, and then bafflings, storms, and sore wanderings on the middle seas. The sides are scarred, the decks are weather-beaten, the canvas is tattered, and the spars are splintered. But how nobly she rides to the wharf. She has done her duty; she was built for the seas, and the seas have tried her and she has won. The long voyage is over; not a precious parcel of her cargo is lost, not one soul for whom the ship sailed away that first fair day is missing; all are safe home at last.

And His voyage is over. It took Him not alone across "the summer circle of the world"; "the flood had borne Him far," and now it is over;

He is safe at home at last. Not one soul for whom He went away from God's Paradise, missing; with this last calm word, He drops anchor in the harbor of the Crystal Sea.

It was the sort of dying that we may expect from Jesus. As you see Him move through the Gospels, you are always conscious that He is very near the border-line, if there be such a thing, between heaven and earth. You would never be altogether surprised if, as you turned the page, you read that He had slipped away to God. He walked so close to the frontier that you sometimes wonder if He is really here or there.

It is no wonder that some men cannot always realize that Jesus is a real man. Death never bewildered Him. He was almost unmoved by it. With those whose heartstrings were being strained by it, He suffered, but He Himself acted as if He was perfectly familiar with it. He goes into the chamber of death and speaks to a dead lass just as if He were waking her from sleep. He meets the funeral procession and bids death bring back a lad's spirit just as if death would do anything for Him. He calls Lazarus back from the other world, and it is clear that for Him death is just an incident in life. He speaks to a dying thief, and we feel that Paradise is very close to the life that now is. And now the Life-Giver is put to the test. Let us see if He will meet death Himself as He met it for others and told others to meet it.

Come and see Christ die. "Father, into thy

hands I commend my spirit." He knows He is dying, but He comes to it with the same calmness, the same simplicity. He is not bewildered, He is not startled. His belief and His life are one in the article of dying. The Eternal Life is taken for granted; He is just to go on living with God as He had done here; this dying is just an incident in His life, a new experience, one in kind with every new experience which had come to Him in the last few years. And so quietly He goes out,—it is all novel, strange, unlovely, the circumstances of the passing,—but God is here, as He has been in every circumstance of His career, and it is all well. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

This word from the cross puts a new face on dying. We think it is going from father, home, and loved ones; He thinks of it as going to the Father, home, and loved ones. It is the act of dying more than the fact which lies beyond it which most of us shrink from. We believe that heaven is beautiful, but it is that mysterious experience which lies between, which throws our feelings into panic; if there were only some other way of passing, but this looks so cold and dark and long. And while we ponder how far it is to the Father, how lonely and long is the trail over the Delectable Mountains, there comes to mind what Jesus said about one lad who went to the Father: "While he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

That is what He said, and that indeed is just

what happened. For when the last came to the last, and His weary spirit rose from the worn-out body, God was waiting for Him, and falling into the Everlasting Arms Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

And so this dying must mean not departure but arrival; not sleeping but waking; not twilight, sunset, night, but twilight, dawn, day.

Some day we shall be able to believe such things about dying, — that it is a going to meet the Father, who has come more than half-way, with the servants bearing in their arms the white robes of immortality, — and then our grief of bereavement will be filled with the sheen of a great gladness, like that of a mother when she gives her daughter to be a bride, or a father when he gives his son to have laid on his head the hands which ordain him to a ministry in the foreign missionary field.

And this last word from the cross gathers all the great family of God together; for He who so spake said before, "Where I am, there ye may be also." And so our loved ones have followed Him who came from the Father and went back to the Father, and their being with Him is our pledge of their immortality.

And what must that mean but that the things which we loved in them are gathering a greater lovableness; that their interest in us goes on; that their prayers for us have greater power; that their sympathy with us is ever watchful; that their characters are fast in God's keeping, guarded against any change which would make them forgetful of us or impossible of rec-

ognition by us when we pass on to the Father. They are with the Father. We know Him; He it is who has cared for our needs; He it is who has been patient with our waywardness; He it is who has been holding the dust of life carefully when rude winds might have blown it away. With the Father, there is no thought of strangeness, no element of unknownness, no misgiving as to unfamiliar faces and untried duties; just a sense of hominess, a suggestion of finding things like old times.

Dying is something we have all got to do; it is well to know how to do it gracefully. Sometimes the call comes so sharp and sudden that it gives a man no time to get ready; sometimes we are out before we know it, out face to face with — God, some would say; it is better to be able to say — my Father. And how can a man come to be able to put it that way?

The secret of living holds the secret of dying. And this is the secret of living, — to make every duty a going to the Father, to greet every experience as a coming of the Father to the life. Get yourself used to thinking that God is in every experience of living, whether it be joy or sorrow, riches or poverty, light or darkness. Get in the habit of looking for God your Father at every turning of your home, your business, your reading, your worship, and you will naturally look for Him at the last turning. So you will get accustomed to finding the Father everywhere; and when it comes to the end, here, as elsewhere, you will say, "I go to the Father."

And how can a man get to know God in that way? When you want to know a great man, want to know him so that you will always feel at ease in his companionship, you seek some one who is very intimate with him. Then you ask this mutual friend all about the great man and say, "Introduce me." And he takes your hand and leads you to the great man, and lays your hand in his hand and says, "This is my friend; I want you two to be friends."

There is One who knows God better than anybody else, and He is very anxious to introduce you to Him. His hand has a wound print in it; it was made one Good Friday lifting a heavy load which lay against the door of your life. And now that Saviour is knocking at your heart, He is waiting to bring God into your life; and if you will let Him in, then God and you will get to feel so much at home with one another that you will not mind where God leads you, even if He take you to walk down the valley of the shadow.

It is easy to learn how to die, if one has learned how to live. And thinking of what Jesus said on Calvary gives me this rule to live by: To think — less of what we are and more of what we ought to be; to speak — never in anger, seldom in criticism, often in praise; to spend — some time with those who are our equals that we may enjoy friendship, much time with those who are stronger than we that we may be kept humble and hopeful, most time with those who are weaker than we that we may learn the grace of serving, and all the time with Christ

that we may keep fresh and clean the spring of gratitude, — to do these things is to walk with God; and of one who does that, it is said when he comes down to the end, "God took him."

A PRAYER OF AUGUSTINE

O Thou Good Omnipotent, who so carest for every one of us, as if Thou carest for him alone; and so for all, as if all were but one! Blessed is the man who loveth Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thee. For he only loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost. And who is that but our God, the God that made heaven and earth, and filleth them, even by filling them creating them. And Thy law is truth, and truth is Thyself. I behold how some things pass away that others may replace them, but Thou dost never depart, O God, my Father supremely good, Beauty of all things beautiful. To Thee will I intrust whatsoever I have received from Thee, so shall I lose nothing. Thou hast made me for Thyself and my heart is restless until it rest in Thee. Amen.

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